
TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN THREATENS U.S. PARTNERSHIP WITH IRAQ AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE

-

31.01.2017

The Washington Post, 30 Jan 2017

IRBIL, Iraq □ A backlash against President Trump's new immigration rules intensified Monday, threatening Washington's relationship with its main partner in battling the Islamic State as Iraq's parliament voted for a reciprocal ban on visas for Americans.

The Iraqi lawmakers' decision is subject to ratification by the government, but it underscores growing resentment over a U.S. executive order that imposed visa restrictions on Iraqis and the citizens of six other Muslim-majority nations.

Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari issued a terse statement describing the ban as unreasonable, given that Iraq is sacrificing the blood of its sons in the front-line fight against the militant group. He urged the United States to reconsider.

About 5,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Iraq to train and assist Iraqi forces, which are close to pushing Islamic State militants out of Mosul, their last major urban stronghold in Iraq.

Given the two countries' close military cooperation, Trump's decision to impose visa restrictions has drawn particular ire in Iraq. Exacerbating that anger, many Iraqis hold the United States responsible for their lack of security because of its 2003 invasion.

In the years since then, Iraqis have taken huge personal risks to support the U.S. military and fight alongside it. But many of those who are in the process of being resettled have been caught up in Trump's 90-day ban on visas and 120-day suspension of refugee entries, adding a new layer of uncertainty after years of arduous security vetting, medical checks and onerous paperwork.

After all I've done for the Americans, entering battles side by side with them, now I'm a terrorist in their eyes, said Salih al-Issawi, 30, who worked as an interpreter with the U.S. Marines in Fallujah between 2006 and 2011, when he applied for resettlement. They are ungrateful and left me stuck here to die.

Six years later, Issawi is still in Fallujah. He fled when the Islamic State took over in 2014, because an association with U.S. forces meant an effective death sentence. But after running out of money to pay rent in northern Iraq, he returned to the city after it was retaken last year. He said he is still at risk from Islamic State sleeper cells and is viewed with suspicion by neighbors.

People still look at me as a spy, he said. He was in the final stages of the resettlement process when Trump signed his order. Now, he doubts he will ever be able to leave.

I regret that I worked with them in the first place and risked my life and my familys lives, he said.

While Trumps executive order is ostensibly meant to protect Americas national security, some say it will have the opposite effect. The 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation □ whose members include all seven nations hit by the travel ban — expressed grave concern Monday.

In a statement, the group said that such selective and discriminatory acts will only serve to strengthen the radical narratives of extremists and will provide further fuel to the advocates of violence and terrorism. It urged the United States to reconsider this blanket statement and maintain its moral obligation to provide leadership and hope at a time of great uncertainty and unrest in the world.

In Ethi-o-pia, the head of the 54-nation African Union predicted turbulent times for the continent because of Trumps action. Three African countries □ Sudan, Libya and Somalia □ were on the list, which also contains Iraq, Syria, Iran and Yemen.

The African Union chief, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, told leaders meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that the very country to which many of our people were taken as slaves during the transatlantic slave trade has now decided to ban refugees from some of our countries.

In Tokyo, a group of about 40 Americans protested near the U.S. Embassy against Trumps travel ban and his plan to build a wall on the Mexico border, waving signs declaring I stand with Muslims and Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

We are all just despondent, said Jesse Glickstein, the American lawyer and grandson of Nazi concentration camp survivors who organized Tuesdays protest. We all felt that we needed to speak up.

Rabbi David Kunin, head of the Jewish Community of Japan, held a sign saying No Muslim Ban. This ban is unconstitutional and it goes against all the values that the United States stands for, and people of all faiths need to stand up and say no to the Muslim ban, no to the wall, no to this kind of violence that stems from hate but also stems from fear, he said. Fear wont build a better world, only love and peace will build a better world.

If they are implemented, retaliatory visa restrictions against Americans could affect thousands of contractors supporting U.S. troops in Iraq.

The U.S. military relies heavily on contractors for logistical support and security for some installations. Nearly 4,000 contractors work for the Defense Department in Iraq. At least 2,035 of them are U.S. citizens. Thousands more support other U.S. government operations.

Government officials from the semiautonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq have refused to comment on the ban, which also affects Iraqi Kurds. Trump has expressed support for the Kurds; he told the New York Times before Novembers election that he was a big fan of their forces.

We, as Kurds, are fighting against terrorism, and the U.S. government is aware of that, said Saadi

Ahmed Pira, head of the foreign relations office for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan political party. He said he did not view the executive order as a decision against Kurds, but he said it was too general.

We dont think it will prevent terrorism, he said. We think what prevents terrorism is cooperation after defeating terrorism militarily, by dealing with the sources of terrorism, in terms of ideology and finances.

A grievance repeatedly cited by Iraqi officials is that Trump included Iraq in the ban but left out countries such as Saudi Arabia, whose nationals have been responsible for attacks on U.S. soil. Saudis made up the majority of the hijackers in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, which were referenced in Trumps order.

Trump has rejected all criticism, insisting the policy is essential to root out terrorists.

There is nothing nice about searching for terrorists before they can enter our country. This was a big part of my campaign, Trump tweeted Monday. Study the world!

Kaynak/Source: